Tarkington's New Novel

"Ramsey Milholland" Has Much of His Magic Wisdom About Adolescence

By Heywood Broun

If there were no one in the world less than eleven nor more than twenty-one the supremacy of Booth Tarkington among novelists would be difficult to dispute. In his new book "Ramsey Milholland" (Doubleday Page) he deals almost entirely with people between these ages, and he shows for the most part his characteristic skill in depicting the moods and manners of adolescence.

At the same time the novel is not thoroughgoing enough by half. Mr. Tarkington has left out what should have been perhaps the most difficult, but also the most interesting, part of his novel. He tells the story of a boy and girl who hated each other in school and became great friends when thrown into association in college. It is an ambivalent romance, if you like. During their college career the war comes along and the young man and the young woman take opposite sides. She is an ardent pacifist and he, while much less articulate, is just as firmly convinced of the justice of America's cause and the necessity of taking up arms. As soon as war is declared the boy enlists and he and the girl part with a good deal of bitterness, for she still remains among the pacifists. But in a short and hasty final chapter Tarkington solves the problem he has set for himself by having the girl suddenly abandon her attitude and join the Red Cross to do her bit.

This is not good workmanship, for Dora Yocum is among Tarkington's best creations, and with great skill and care he has indicated the reasons for her belief in pacifism. He has allowed her to state her case at a good deal of length, and so he should follow with as much care and detail the emotional and mental processes by which she was won over to the support of the war. That, after all, ought to be one of the vital factors of the novel. It represents, we should say, a conflict between an intellectual who has arrived perfectly logically at a wrong position and a much duller witted person who, with no logic at all, has decided right cheerly by instinct. But, since we have been taught in the early part of the novel to accept the girl as a person whose convictions are well and carefully reasoned, it is Tarkington's duty to let us watch the manner in which she reasons her way out of pacifism.

It is not enough for him to tell us that "Dora Yocum, listening to 'The Star-Spangled Banner,' sung by children of immigrants to an out-of-tune old piano in a mission clubroom, in Chicago, found herself crying with a soulshaking heartiness in a way different from other ways that she had cried."

There is, in addition to this, only the briefest sketch of the manner in which she arrived at her new point of view. This seems to us a careless haste. "Ramsey Milholland" is too interesting a piece of work to be ended so abruptly.

The most amusing portion of "Ramsey Milholland" concerns the schoolboy affair of Ramsey and Milla Rust. Things came to such a pass between them that "he was afraid that the day was coming when he ought to kiss her." Eventually he did, and to his horror the next day he received the following letter:

"Dearie: I am just wondering if you thought as much about something so sweet that happened last night as I did you know what. I think it was the sweetest thing. I send you one with this note and I hope you will think it is a sweet one. I would give you a real one if you were here now and I hope you would think it was sweeter still than the one I put in this note. It is the sweetest thing now you are mine and I am yours forever kiddo. If you come around about friday eve it will be all right. aunt Jess will be gone back home by then so come early and we will get Sade and Alb and go to the band Concert. don't forget what I said about my putting something sweet in this note, and I hope you will think it is a sweet one but not as sweet as the real sweet one I would like to"——

It was at this point that Ramsey tore up the letter. Nothing much came of the affair, because soon after that Milla went away. Ramsey received a picture postcard from Oconomowoc, Wis., with "Oh, you Ramsey!" written on it, but that was the last of Milla.

Some of the new series of Mr. Dooley called "Mr. Dooley on Making a Will and Other Necessary Evils" (Scribner's) have already received magazine publication and one comes across a few names which no longer carry out the original intent. Little boys no longer idolize "Cap Chance," nor do people speak now of "Jack Johnson's punch." But others deal with more eternal things, such as "Old Age" and "Going to See the Doctor" and again Finley Peter Dunne has worked so extremely well with subjects which are no longer of the moment that he can still gain hilarity.

Golf, for instance, has been rather extensively cultivated by the humorists, and yet Dunne is able to go over the ground and find new material. Also, there is fun in his discourse on such a familiar subject of satire as auction bridge, in which he remarks, "No one is surprised to see a lady feedin' th' baby with wan hand an' revokin' with the' other."

The game proves a puzzle to Dooley when he sits behind Hogan and observes his bidding.

"'I make it two clubs,' says Hogan. 'Why, ye mamalook,' says I in a whisper, 'ye haven't got a club in ye'er hand.' 'Hush up,' says he. 'That's to tell me pardner I'm short iv dimons,' he says. 'Thin why don't ye kick him undher th' table and pint to ye'er shirt-front?' says I. 'That wud be cheatin,' says he. 'An what's this?' says I. 'Tis givin' information,' says he. 'It's what makes th' game th' most scientific in th' wurrld,' he says."

There is also excellent fooling in the burlesque on the "inside baseball" craze which filled our magazines and newspapers a few years ago and in general an abundance of evidence that Dunne can write satire about things of the moment well enough to make his essays carry on.

BOOTH TARKINGTON

Author of "Ramsey Milholland" (Doubleday-Page).

Documents of Brest-Litovsk Published by Magnes

RUSSIA AND GERMANY AT BREST-LITOVSK, by Judah L. Magnes. Published by the Rand School of Social Science.

"Russia and Germany at Brest-Litovsk" is a compilation by Judah L. Magnes of whatever documents, press clippings and speeches were available bearing on these negotiations. Censorship and official secrecy necessarily make this a fragmentary history. Nevertheless, incomplete as it is, it presents a large quantity of material on each of the many sides involved through which the patient searcher after relevancy in the haystack of red tape may profitably wade. In the light of subsequent events, and in context with the events that inspired it, Mr. Wilson's speech on the Brest-Litovsk parleys has a remarkable effect. It is interesting to be reminded that he said on that occasion: "The treatment accorded Russia by her sister nations in the months to come will be the acid test of their good will, of their comprehension of her need as distinguished from their own interests, and of their intelligent and unselfish sympathy."

Gossip

Arnold Bennett's "Judith"

"Judith," Arnold Bennett's new play (George H. Doran Company), has been staged very successfully in London. The story is founded upon the Apocryphal Book of Judith, but, although the story has heretofore been considered a tragedy, Mr. Bennett has not treated it that way. The London "Bookman" imagines the following conversation, which might have been delivered by Mr. Bennett: "The purple pall of tragedy," he may say, "is a mere convention. Every age has been, in its own eyes, as commonplace as ours. Œdipus and Agamemnon did not speak in iambic trimeters, nor Coriolanus and Mark Anthony in blank verse. The cothurnus belongs to the historical museum, not to living art. The art which seeks impressiveness in representing people as we know they were not is an art I despise. Judith and Holofernes were, in their day, quite as ordinary people as Hilda Lessways and Edwin Clayhanger, and as such I propose to portray them. As no man is a hero to his valet, we may be sure that Judith was not a heroine to her waiting-woman; wherefore I will make Haggith burlesque her mistress's action, and cheerfully ensnare a lout of an Assyrian. Also it is absurd to represent that a pretty woman in the days of Nebuchadnezzar would doom herself to perpetual widowhood merely because she had chopped off a man's head. Therefore, my Judith shall have a happy ending, and marry, as she naturally would, the other sympathetic personage of the story, Achior, to wit. Mr. Charles Ricketts shall do what he likes in the way of dressing and undressing my characters; for we know that people in those days did get themselves up queerly. But, under their fantastic trappings, they shall just be the ordinary men and women of modern realistic art."

Consistent Best Sellers

Among the six best selling works of fiction last month, according to reports from fifty-five representative bookshops in forty-three cities, Doubleday, Page & Co.'s publications, "The Arrow of Gold," by Joseph Conrad, and "Christopher and Columbus" stand second and third on the list.

Published early last spring, both these books have, from the time of their appearance, consistently held their place in the popular demand against all varieties of newcomers.

"The Choice," by Weyl, Brilliant First Novel

Maurice Weyl is a born story teller, and, to my way of thinking, he has written "The Choice" in a simple, graceful style that marks him as a distinguished initiate to the fraternity of first class modern American novelists. Maurice Weyl—a brother of the noted publicist and scholar, Walter Weyl—is a successful Philadelphia business man who has heretofore devoted his leisure hours to the composition of music. I do not know what turned Mr. Weyl's attention from business and music to literature, but I hazard a guess that his arrival on the field portends a distinct advance in American letters.

I hardly think that it will lead to international complications if I reveal the fact that a certain eminent English editor and critic, who is visiting our country, says that Mr. Weyl bids fair to become the American Arnold Bennett! I don't like to press this matter, but I do hope that you will find time to look into "The Choice." It is really a most extraordinary piece of writing. Easy reading, too. H. B. SELL.

A New War

Frost Sees Future Menaces By Commercial Germany

GERMANY'S NEW WAR AGAINST AMERICA. By Stanley Frost. E. P. Dutton & Co., New York.

The danger that German commercial organization may achieve the conquest of the world even after the defeat of the German armies is vividly set forth in Mr. Frost's book. The author points out that Germany's industrial fabric was not touched by the ravages of war, whereas France, Belgium and Poland are economically crippled for years to come. He quotes at length from the work of a German industrial expert, named Herzog, to prove that Germany is planning a gigantic campaign to capture and control the trade and industry of the world for her own selfish profit.

Mr. Frost outlines various unscrupulous devices by which the Germans have gained commercial success in the past, and which they may be expected to employ in the future. Perhaps their most formidable weapon is the practice familiarly known as "dumping." A large quantity of German goods is exported to some foreign country and sold at prices which exclude all competition. This practice, of course, has been facilitated by the autocratic control which the German government has always exercised over German industry. This control, in Mr. Frost's opinion, will be strengthened, rather than weakened, under the present Teutonic régime of state socialism. Taking much of his material from the records of the alien property custodians, A. Mitchell Palmer and his successor, Francis P. Garvan, the author describes the economic penetration of America by German capital in the years before the war. In the production of metals and dyes, in shipping and insurance companies, German influence was potent and sinister. A great deal of enemy owned property has been sold, but much remains undetected, and Mr. Frost is convinced that the infiltration of German capital will begin again, now that trading restrictions have been removed.

Mr. Frost points out the grave danger of allowing the Germans to regain control of the American dye and potash market. He anticipates that large quantities of these substances will be shipped into this country and sold at ruinously low prices in the near future, in order to destroy the American industries which developed during the war. As a matter of patriotism and sound business instinct alike he urges consumers of dyes and potash not to be attracted by the deceptively low prices of the German products, and thereby give Germany a monopoly of the market again. Incessant personal watchfulness is the author's remedy for future Teutonic commercial intrigue.

W. H. C.

The Vested Interests

Veblen's Book Condemns Modern Industrial Methods

THE VESTED INTERESTS AND THE STATE OF THE INDUSTRIAL ARTS. By Thorstein Veblen. Published by B. W. Huebsch, New York.

In a long and ponderous volume entitled "The Higher Learning in America" Professor Veblen attempted to demonstrate that American business men are altogether unfit to control American universities. In his present book, smaller in bulk, but equally ponderous in style, he essays to prove that they are equally unfit to direct American industry. The author feels that there is a wide gulf between the actual conditions prevailing in modern industry and the eighteenth century theories of political economy which determine our legislation and our habits of thought. Adam Smith and his school did not foresee the tremendous industrial revolution that came as the result of the introduction of modern machinery, the evolution of corporate ownership, the development of great and powerful combinations of capital.

Professor Veblen contends that modern industrial enterprises are directed with a view to profits, not to service. Contradicting the familiar theory that uncontrolled private initiative provides the best service in the long run, the author insists that production is consistently and deliberately limited in order to create artificially high prices. Limited production, in turn, entails unemployment and forces down wages. Professor Veblen tersely defines a vested interest as "a legitimate right to get something for nothing." These interests, expressed in the form of protective tariffs, monopoly control of markets, watered stocks, etc., support a minority of the population in idleness at the expense of the hard working and exploited majority.

Veblen does not employ the fiery and unrestrained phraseology that is usually employed by exponents of radical views. On the contrary, his writing is characterized throughout by conscious restraint, academic precision and delicate irony. Upon close analysis, however, his views constitute a thoroughgoing and scathing indictment of the modern social organism. It seems a pity that such a vigorous and original piece of economic thinking should be somewhat obscured by the author's heavy and cumbersome style. Veblen's occasional shrewd definitions and pungent epigrams are overbalanced by his habitual use of long, unwieldy sentences, whose awkward construction suggests German prose at its worst.

W. H. C.

Rollicking Humor in Irwin's Novel

THE BLOOMING ANGEL. By Wallace Irwin. Published by George H. Doran Company.

Irwin's novel is like a one-ring circus—concentrated fun. "The Blooming Angel" is a girl—not one of the darn-noble sort, but a bit of fluff, bright, impertinent and distractingly pretty. Her assets are a complexion, an ability to re-create from an old hat a piece of millinery, and a jolly affection for a husband who is rather lacking in a sense of humor.

How the bit of fluff marries Chester A. Framm, from the college laundry, discourages his ambition to be an actor, and makes him the millionaire president of the Framm Complexion Company, Inc., make a diverting story full of bright situations and much real humor.

About a Column

We've Skipped Bigger Ones Than That

Kind Sir: It isn't fair for a newspaper critic to take advantage of his faithful public as you did when you gave us the straight tip re "Zuleika Dobson."

For maybe you know what "peripety," "virguncules," "deliquium," "orgulous," "dulia," "disseizin," and the rest of the little word strangers all mean. But we're just the common people. And it's, oh, several degrees too hot to be leaping toward the dictionary every other paragraph. You and F. Hackett can have your Max in August if you like. But we'll stick to—oh, well, fill in the aposiopesis for yourself.

TWINKLES.

"Gallimaufry, chevelure, susurrus, precisian, jacamar, ataraxy.

And Again Fifty

It was indeed a surprise to me to see that some one person had sufficient enterprise and sufficient confidence to propose a list of the fifty best books. Ever since the publication of the appeal in your column, I have waited anxiously for some one to come forth with a list containing, in their estimation, the fifty best books of literature. Miss Hale's list is a proof of her erudition, but fails to make the best of her judicial powers.

Of course, the value and appeal of books are entirely dependent upon the person—"Jack Spratt ate no fat . . ." —but in all tastes there is some common ground. It would be useless to deny that the books contained in the list compiled by Miss Hale were good books, but are they the best books? I shall not attempt to answer that question for fear that I, too, might bare myself to justified criticism.

In a compilation such as this I would be willing to omit such masters as Scott, Sheridan, Goldsmith, Turgenieff, Lamb, Hugo, Balzac, Cooper, Eliot, Calderon, and a quantity more of masters of like quality. Such a list is bound by the arbitrary number set by the one who desires it as a nucleus for a library, or else who could exclude such delightful stories as "She Stoops to Conquer," "The Essays of Elia," "The Cherry Orchard," "Ivanhoe," "Ninety-three," "The Wild Ass's Skin" and a host of others fairly overflowing with genuineness and true merit?

But from so small a list I cannot see excluded "Vanity Fair," Thackeray; "The Pickwick Papers," Dickens; "Don Quixote," Cervantes; "The Wild Duck," Ibsen; "Iris," Pinero, or any of the now popular Leonard Merrick. I candidly admit that Thackeray, Dickens and Ibsen are becoming passé, but how does their loss of popular repute affect the supreme qualities of their literary productions? Leonard Merrick's popularity has grown almost overnight; a few years ago he was known to only a few of the initiated, and welcomed by them as a true representative of literary talent. The very testimonials given him by his colleagues should warrant him a leading place in a list of the best. Where can one find more delicate humor, applied with so light and so deft a touch, as in "While Paris Laughed"?

It is almost discouraging to see any one propose such a list with the above omissions, but to take specific notice of some of the suggestions:

Why give "Jean and Peter" when "Tono-Bungay" is available?

Has not "The Way of All Flesh" superior merits when taken side by side with "Life and Habit"?

For a list so limited, G. B. S.'s "Man and Superman" is infinitely better than "Cæsar and Cleopatra."

And "Penrod and Sam"—would you want our own Booth Tarkington to be known by the qualities contained in that, or rather by the skill shown in writing "The Gentleman From Indiana" or "The Magnificent Ambersons"?

Are the works of Smith, Huneker, O'Higgins and Hudson to be compared with those of Washington Irving, Emerson, "the Hoosier Poet," Scribe, Flaubert, de Maupassant, Kipling, Dunsany, Pater—oh! and tens of others who could easily be named? Is true literary merit to be set aside for current interest and fanciful appeal?

Is there no one in the audience who will try to do better—or why not try again, Miss Hale?

PAUL B. FRANKLIN.

"Air Men o' War"

I have just received a copy of your review of my book "Air Men o' War," and your reviewer's criticism is so kindly and favorable that I'd hate to have him left with the belief that I hadn't played fair and given the Hun his dues as a fighter. I did not refrain from telling a tale of British fliers outnumbering the German because it would have shown the Hun in a favoring light, but simply because I never heard of such a fight. In the last year or two of the war the Hun fliers apparently made it a deliberate policy not to fight unless they had the odds well in their favor, and I am sure there are many American airmen, especially at least among those who were attached to and fought in British squadrons, who will support me in this statement. The German policy was certainly a wise one for them, because it was proved to the hilt over and over again that British and American air fighters could beat the Hun nine times out of ten, with the heavy odds against our men.

BOYD CABLE.

In Defence of Villon

I suppose it is quite futile for an unarmed layman to seek to break a lance with so imposingly panoplied a knight as Rupert Hughes, but I should like permission for one small joust, if possible. In criticising, and very fairly criticising, Mr. Viereck apropos his book on Roosevelt, Mr. Hughes stops long enough to bestow on a dead poet the catholic and appreciative remark that he was "a yellow dog."

Now, the point to my mind is not that the poet has been dead a great many years, nor again that he made a somewhat sorry mess of life, but that the passage of time should leave a capable, if somewhat hysterical (and therefore enormously popular), modern writer in a state of mind where he can print such an epithet and not immediately expire from shame at his own fatuity. I do not know on what fact or rumor Mr. Hughes bases his remarkable criticism of Villon; I suppose on Stevenson's essay, or possibly the fact that Villon was once in jail, a place reserved in Mr. Hughes's mind for German spies, white-slavers and food profiteers. Mr. Hughes has his place, I suppose, both in literature and life. He has served his land competently and long. He has written some fair fiction, and also some atrocious and vaporing twaddle. But as an estimator of poets and men he is just what the author of "The Unforgivable Sin" might be expected to be. Please spare us, your readers, any more of his moyen age French psychology.

If Mr. Hughes is not too busy turning out pot-boilers, he might care to learn the true case of Villon from the essays of De Vere Stacpoole or John Payne, two men whose clean wind of thought might blow the non-conformist mists of Stevenson and other talented prigs out of his mind.

RICHARD DESMOND.